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Title: Book and Radio Play Silences : Medial Pauses and Reticence in ‘Murke's Collected Silences’ by Heinrich Böll

Year: 2019

Version: Accepted version (Final draft)

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Please cite the original version:

Keskinen, M. (2019). Book and Radio Play Silences : Medial Pauses and Reticence in ‘Murke's Collected Silences’ by Heinrich Böll. CounterText, 5(3), 352-370. https://doi.org/10.3366/count.2019.0170

Book and Radio Play Silences:

Medial Pauses and Reticence in ‘Murke’s Collected Silences’ by Heinrich Böll

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Abstract:

This article analyses silence at the interface between print and audio media by reading and listening to Heinrich Böll’s short story ‘Murke’s Collected Silences’ (‘Doktor Murkes gesammeltes Schweigen’) in its book (1958) and three German-language radio play versions (1965; 1986; 1989). Reference is also made to Benjamin Gwilliam’s sound art piece (2005/2007) based on the 1986 adaptation. The Böll story thematizes silence and media in various ways, and has definite countertextual aspects, in the sense of technology, textuality, and materiality of language. In the printed story, silence is either verbally named or typographically indicated, whereas the radio plays present of perform it. The comparison of the three silence-related scenes in the Murke radio plays shows considerable variation in the length and manner of pauses. The article considers the differences in receiving silence through print and audio media, and concludes that ‘Murke’ demonstrates, in both formats, that the medium is an integral part of the ‘message’, even the silent one.

Keywords: Radio play, adaptation, Heinrich Böll, silence, noise, intermediality, sound recording

In this article, I study silence at the interface between print and audio media by reading and listening to Heinrich Böll’s short story ‘Doktor Murkes gesammeltes Schweigen’ (‘Murke’s

Collected Silences') in its print and three German-language radio play versions (1965; 1986; 1989). As a coda, I also consider Benjamin Gwilliam's sound art piece (2005/2007) based on the 1986 adaptation.

The Böll story itself thematizes silence and media in various ways. The story's protagonist, Dr Murke, is a radio editor, who collects segments of silent audiotape while working at the German public broadcasting company in the early 1950s. The narrative also features a quotation from a radio drama manuscript with the acoustic qualities and quietness parenthetically indicated. Furthermore, conversational pauses, hesitations, and overall reticence punctuate the characters' dialogue.

Böll's 'Doktor Murkes gesammeltes Schweigen' (hereafter 'Murke' in the text) first appeard in 1955 in the liberal left-wing periodical *Frankfurter Hefte* and was reprinted in his eponymous 1958 collection of satirical short stories.[1] Given the historical and political context of its publication dates, just a decade after the Second World War, the short story's most apparent satiric target seems to be the silencing or revision of the recent German past.[2] Especially the character called Bur-Malottke embodies this tendency. He is an ex-Nazi, who, after regretting his religious conversion of 1945, insists on having the word *Gott* (that is, *God*) replaced by the phrase 'jenes höhere Wesen, das wir verehren' (8) ['that higher Being Whom we revere' [29]) in his audiotaped radio essays. More generally, the editorial policy of national broadcasting in the compliant service of historical revision and manipulation is part of Böll's satiric treatment. Murke's idiosyncratic collection of silences may appear absurd and might suggest that Böll's short story itself is absurdist. However, there is a definite and

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[1] I use the following German and English-language editions of the short story: Böll, *Doktor Murkes gesammeltes Schweigen und andere Satire*, Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1965, pp. 5–53; Böll, *Stories, Political Writings, and Autobiographical Works*, trans. Leila Vennewitz, ed. Martin Black, New York: Continuum, 2006: 28–48. Both are hereafter cited parenthetically.

[2] For a contextualizing reading of silence in postwar German literature, see Schlant 1999. Unfortunately, that study does not cover Böll's 'Murke'. For other German literary studies on silence, see Eggert and Golec 1999; Hart Nibbrig 1981; Fuchs and Luhmann 1989; Grabher and Jessner 1996; and Ulsamer 2002.

sane logic behind Murke's acts and narrative. He keeps the silent bits cut off from the recorded radio programmes and pastes them into a whole, or actively produces reticence, thus creating a tape of uninterrupted silence, which he uses for self-therapeutic purposes at home. His collection of silences functions as a remedy for his veritable occupational hazard, for the venomous effect of having to listen to other people's empty or inauthentic words at work (48–49 / 46).

There are also definite countertextual aspects, in the sense of technology, textuality, and materiality of language, in Murke's pursuits. Murke's work on silence and audiotape relates to avant-garde artists' analogous practices in the 1950s. John Cage famously did musical and musicological studies on silence (including the 1952 composition *4'33"*) and on noise abatement, as well as experimented with audiotape by cutting and collaging pieces of recorded sounds, both musical and nonmusical. In literature, William Burroughs's experimentations with audiotape cut-up has definite affinity with Murke's treatment of recorded sound material for therapeutic and liberating purposes (cf. Kahn 2001: 113–16, 158–223, 314–21; Olsson 2011: 67–69). Samuel Beckett's play *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) dramatizes the ideological and sonic differences between a character's tape-recorded past speech and live present discourse as does 'Murke'. Unlike Murke, the old Krapp does not alter the materiality of the tapes featuring the speech of his younger selves; however, he does edit their content on the fly by frequently pausing the reels and by commenting on his past utterances. In my reading, 'Murke' studies the medial basis and extensions of communication, including those in literature.

The print versions of the Böll story represent silence with various notational conventions, whereas the radio play renderings present or perform it. Most theorists of radio narrative acknowledge that silence is one of the elements from which it is constructed, together with the more obvious speech, music, and sound effects (Frank 1981; Allen 2005:

481; Huwiler 2016: 102). However, silence has not received as much scholarly attention as the other vital constituents of audio art.[3] By reading and listening to Böll's story, I seek to give silence the media-sensitive consideration it deserves (for an earlier take on the print story from this perspective, see Keskinen 2008: 51–70).

The Böll case relates to intermediality in two senses proposed by Lars Elleström (2014). First, as audio adaptations of Böll's printed short story, the radio plays can be called *transmediation*, in which something already mediated is remediated in some other media (cf. Elleström 2014: 4, 14). Second, as portrayals of sound technological media, both the short story and its adaptations are *media representations* (Elleström 2014: 15). The Böll example is particularly interesting because the initial media representation is brought back exactly to the media represented: the reel-to-reel tape recorder and radio. The analog technologies of sound storage and transmission that the short story features are present in the radio plays – not only in their storyworlds but also as parts of the diegetic soundscape generated by those very devices. Furthermore, the tape recorder makes it possible to produce and store the acoustic drama works in their entirety, whereas radio technology enables their broadcasting to listeners.[4]

As Linda Hutcheon (2006: 71) notes, '[a]bsences and silences in prose narratives almost invariably get made into presences in performance media'. The case is slightly different when the medium itself is at stake in the original, as it is in Böll. Reticence and soundlessness are materially present in the print storyworld from the outset, which means that, in adaptation, they morph into other kinds of presences, not into some radically different

[3] Some fairly recent audiobook studies pay attention to pauses, muting, and the theme of silencing and how it is executed in that medium (see Stewart 2011: 116–118, 123–124; Wittkower 2011: 221–225). For expressly audionarratological studies on radio drama and audio art, see Huwiler 2016; Lutostański 2016; Bernaerts 2016; Mildorf 2017; Kinzel 2017.

[4] This holds true with the initial publication of the works; currently, they are available in digitized forms (CD, MP3, and online streaming), either commercially (the 1986 adaptation) or upon request from the radio broadcasting companies that produced them (the other two radio plays in my corpus).

category. By foregrounding the technologies of sound storage and reproduction, the short story in a way anticipates its future audio versions. I shall concentrate on three scenes in Böll's story and study how the print and audio versions handle the phenomenon of silence.

How to Make Silence Visible or Audible

Before going into the 'Murke' story, let us digress and contemplate the following quotation: ' ' (Harpo Marx). If that quotation appeared in Harpo Marx's autobiography *Harpo Speaks!* (1961; written with Rowland Parker) and if there were an audiobook version of it, how would that quotation sound? Presumably, the audiobook narrator could either be silent, or describe or name the absence of words between the quotation marks.[5]

The Harpo citation is a hoax, for he never said it – and by the same gesture, he always did, at least in the Marx brothers talkies. The example serves as a concise introduction to the representation of silence in print and sound media. It is symptomatic that we easily find the Harpo quote funny or absurd. A citation containing nothing or, rather, containing the lack of words or sounds, seems incongruous. Can silence be cited? And why provide the absence of audible or visible information with quotation marks?

Writing, and by extension literature, is mute in the sense that it utilizes visual signs that by definition articulate nothing as such. When read aloud or "evocalized" (as is done in the so-called phonemic reading as theorized by Garrett Stewart, 1990), the signs are

[5] Harpo was, of course, the non-speaking member of the Marx brothers in their films, although he was hardly a quiet actor. He famously communicated by making a lot of noise with horns, drums, and harps, not to mention other props of various kinds. In the mid-1930s, Harpo also appeared weekly in his brothers' verbose national radio show, never saying a word. Harpo Marx was not actually mute, nor was he reticent as a writer, as his autobiography testifies.

attributed sonic qualities and the empirical muteness turns into sounds or prompted cerebral and muscular activity preparing for enunciation.

Literature customarily represents sound phenomena (characters' speech and the storyworld's overall soundscape, that is, the sounds of nature and culture in it). The absence of sound (silence, reticence, or pause) is also represented or marked in literature in a variety of ways, as for instance the plays *Waiting for Godot* (1953) and *Endgame* (1957) by Samuel Beckett, and *The Birthday Party* (1957) by Harold Pinter show. The two forms of representation are not, however, symmetrical. The *possibility* of sound and its representation are embedded in all writing, whereas silence could be called the very token of writing from the outset. Therefore, we could state that writing itself, whatever the reference, performatively represents silence on account of its primordial and empirical muteness.

The presence of the signifier entails the absence of the signified. When we use the word 'silence', its verbal form becomes present but its signified in a way comes to be doubly absent (on account of the signifying system and the signified itself). What this seems to mean is, paradoxically, that expressed silence is more silent than unexpressed silence. Silence is also conveyed with typographic means in literature, and not only verbally. The ineffability of typography seems to be in unison with the lack of auditory information usually associated with the concept of silence. Silence can be represented with conventions such as a blank (or black) blocks of text, empty lines, suspension points, dashes, holes in a page, ellipses, and morphological erasure.

Withholding narrative discourse does not equal lack of signification. But what is given as a notation of silence in print is performed in audiobooks and radio plays. I now turn to that difference in 'Murke' and the radio plays based on it.

Inscribed Silences

Silence, as a signifier, is prominently present in Böll's story from the outset, as it figures in the title and thereafter repeatedly in the discourse. Silences, or pauses, in speech are also marked nonverbally, with the usual means of punctuation marks (dashes and suspension points). In this section, I shall focus on three instances in the story and demonstrate how silence is either named or indicated in the print medium. In the next section, I shall analyse how these same instances are executed in the three radio play adaptations of my corpus.

After having had his taped radio speech painstakingly revised by Dr Murke, an ex-Nazi called Bur-Malottke suggests to the broadcasting company director that all his post-1945 tapes be corrected, for the reason that he, too, is mortal. This realization makes him hesitate and pause:

> "Eines Tages", sagte er – er fuhr sich über die Stirn und blickte schwermütig auf den echten Brüller, der über des Intendanten Schreibtisch hing –, "eines Tages werde ich" – er stockte, den die Mitteilung, die er dem Intendanten zu machen hatte, war zu schmerzlich für die Nachwelt – , "eines Tages werde ich – sterben werde ich – ", und er machte wieder eine Pause und gab dem Intendanten Gelegenheit, bestürzt auszusehen und abwehrend mit der Hand zu winken – "und es ist mir unerträglich, daran zu denken, dass nach meinem Tode möglicherweise Bänger ablaufen, auf denen Dinge sage, von denen ich nicht mehr überzeugt war." (37)
>
> ["One day," he said – he passed his hand over his forehead and gazed wistfully at the genuine Kokoschka above the director's desk – "one day I shall" – he faltered, for the news he was about to break to the director was too painful for posterity – "one day I shall . . . die," and he paused again, giving the director a chance to look gravely shocked and raise his hand in protest, "and I cannot bear the thought that after my death, tapes may be run off on which I say things I no longer believe in. (41)]

The three attempts to start and complete his sentence are punctuated with mentioned and indicated breaks of speech into silence. The narrated (and 'omnisciently' interpreted) paralinguistic gestures and gazes imply pauses caused by emotional turmoil, at least seemingly. The hiatuses are further emphasized by dashes and suspension points around or within the utterances. Rather than a genuine expression of emotion, however, Bur-Malottke's

delivery resembles a stage speech or a dramatic monologue. Its three-part structure and gradually accumulative syntax, complete with theatrical gesticulations, suggest that even the hesitations are in fact dramatic pauses, put there for effect.

My second example of silence takes place at Murke's home where he asks his girlfriend Rina to be quiet for several minutes in order to tape-record her continuous silence. She protests, breaking her enforced vow of silence and simultaneously ruining the mute recording session: 'Beschweigen, das ist auch so eine Erfindung von dir. Ein Band besprechen würde ich mal gern – aber beschweigen . . .' (48) ['Put silence, that's another of your inventions. I wouldn't mind putting words onto tape – but putting silence . . . .' (46)]. The dialogue between Murk and Rina is framed by two sections that describe the capturing of noiselessness on tape:

> (1.) Zwischen Murke und dem Mädchen, auf einem Rauchtisch, stand ein Bandgerät, das auf Aufnahme gestellt war. (47)
> [Between Murke and the girl, on a low coffee table, stood a tape recorder, recording. Not a word was spoken, not a sound was made. (45)]
>
> (2.) Er stellte das Band wieder ein, und beide sassen schweigend einander gegenüber, bis das Telefon klingelte. (49)
> [He switched the tape on again, and they sat facing one another in silence till the telephone rang. (46)]

Those sections mention silence and its conditions, either as a lack or as plenitude.

The third case of silence relates to the very writing/articulation interface that this article seeks to investigate. The assistant drama producer listens to a radio play due to be broadcast in a few hours. In his opinion, the ending of the play sounds awkward. The radio play climaxes with an atheist uttering twelve questions in an empty church. The questions deal with the survivors after the atheist's death. The assistant producer and a technician study the following part of the script:

> *(Akustik in einer grossen leeren Kirche)*
> *Atheist: (spricht laut und klar) Wer denkt noch an mich, wenn ich der Würmer Raub geworden bin?*
> *(Schweigen)*
> *Atheist: (um eine Nuance lauter sprechend) Wer wartet auf mich, wenn ich wieder zu Staub geworden bin?*
> *(Schweigen)*
> *Atheist: (noch lauter) Und wer denkt noch an mich, wenn ich wieder zu Laub geworden bin?*
> *(Schweigen)*
> (50–51; emphases in original)

> [(Sound effects of a large empty church)
> Atheist (in a loud clear voice): Who will remember me when I have become the prey of worms?
> (Silence)
> Atheist (his voice a shade louder): Who will wait for me when I have turned into dust?
> (Silence)
> Atheist (louder still): And who will remember me when I have turned into leaves?
> (Silence)]
> (47)

The manuscript indicates the sonic specifications of the scene in parentheses (acoustics of the soundscape, volume of voice, and silence as stage directions of sorts). Silence is thus named in writing, rather than indicated by using dashes or suspension points, suggesting perhaps that the soundlessness is as actively produced in the recording studio as are the other sonic phenomena. One could even assume that the fact that each question is met with silence does not merely mean the nonexistence of an answer, but that it *is* the answer (implying that there is nobody thinking about or waiting for him). Silence thus gains the status and power of an oxymoronic taciturn utterance or, in Christoph Schubert's terms (2012), a zero speech act.

Auditory Silences

I first briefly describe the three radio play adaptations of Böll's 'Murke', and then compare the treatment of the three cases of silence in them.

The 1965 Saarländischer Rundfunk adaptation of ‘Murke’ resembles an audiobook in that it is read by one actor, Dieter Hufschmidt, who performs the short story in its entirety and thus plays all its roles by changing his voice into more ‘feminine’, by lisping, or producing stage pronunciation. The different sections of the story are marked by incidental music ranging from trio jazz to the first bars of Beethoven’s 5th, and monophonic studio technology is used to create sound effects (different acoustic spaces, fading, and mixing) but no Foley.

The 1986 Südwestfunk/Saarländischer Rundfunk production is a full-bred radio drama featuring a narrator and twenty actors, complete with original music. The stereophonic soundscape is permeated with varying acoustics and Foley effects of a paternoster lift, studio recording devices, and an intercom.

The 1989 Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen (SRF) version abridges Böll’s text heavily, summarizing and paraphrasing the opening scene and omitting some others completely. The running time of the radio play is 28 minutes (against the respective 56 and 51 minutes of the other two in my corpus). The narrator is a woman, and there are a number of actors playing the male and female roles. The radio play features various stereophonic sound effects (different acoustics, fading, mixing, and Foley of the reel-to-reel and studio intercom turning on and off).

It is to be noted that all three recordings are originally analog, but currently not easily available in reel-to-reel or cassette formats. The material studied in this article appears on CDs and thus in digitized form.

Hesitation Pauses

The 1965 adaptation performs Bur-Malottke's hesitant statement about his own mortality in such a way that the three pauses along the way to the completion of the sentence last a good second each (at 36:53, 37:04, and 37:12 respectively). Silences of that length stand out quite prominently in the otherwise rapid pace of reading by Dieter Hufschmidt and thus create the dramatic effect Bur-Malottke is presumably aiming at.[6]

The 1986 version reduces the mortality hesitation into a single one-second pause (track 7: 04:40). In contrast, this paused utterance is preceded by a hesitative exchange of words between Bur-Malottke and the director (track 7: 04:20–04:39). These changes in the location of the pauses shift the emphasis from Bur-Malottke's theatricality to his uncertainty about asking the favour of editing his taped speeches.

In the 1989 version, Bur-Malottke's hesitation count is two. The first one (at 20:02) is cut in by the narrator's voice-over, which seemingly shortens the pause to a fraction of a second; on the other hand, the narrator's reporting ('er stockte, den die Mitteilung, die er dem Intendanten zu machen hatte, war zu schmerzlich für die Nachwelt'; ['he faltered, for the news he was about to break to the director was too painful for posterity]) prolongs the implied duration of the pause to seven seconds (finishing at 20:09). The second pause (at 20:11), uninterrupted, lasts for approximately one second.

Taping Live Silence

In the 1965 version of the Rina scene, the suspension points of the incomplete sentence 'aber beschweigen . . .' (48) ['but putting silence. . . .' (46)] yield a second-and-a-half long and thus noticeable silence (at 49:58). The first of the framing sequences describing the tape-recording

[6] This prominence is in keeping with studies on silences in naturally occurring conversation. When a pause last longer than the "standard metric" of one second, speakers find it disturbing and make an effort to utter something to break the silence (Jefferson 1986).

(at 49:10–49:19) is read at a slower pace and in a soft tone of voice, thus creating a serene and quiet atmosphere. The second frame (at 50:36–50:40), however, is read at normal speed, without any discernible impression of taciturnity.

In the 1986 version, the presentation of silence is shifted from the typographically indicated to the narrated. There is no noticeable silence in Rina's unfinished sentence, unlike in the surrounding narrative sequences. The first framing part is read in a mellow, quiet, and slow-paced voice, and there is a five-second silence before Rina breaks into speech (track 11: 00:40–00:45). The second one is even longer, the unheard-of eight seconds in total (track 11: 02:06–02:13). This amount of dead air on radio is risky but also very effective in delivering the phenomenon of silence and its implications.

The whole Rina scene is missing from the considerably abridged 1989 adaptation, so there is no third case to be compared with the previous two. Given the paradoxical logic of (re)presenting silence, however, the very absence of the scene in a way performs and makes it present. Therefore, cutting off the scene from the radio play brings its referent into existence. What remains of the scene is the narrator's mention that Murke is lying on his couch at home when the phone rings. This could imply, for those who know Böll's text, that he has been enjoying cozy silence before it is interrupted.

Tacit Answers

In the 1965 version, the narrator reads the church scene in its entirety, including the parentheses. Church acoustics is audible in the soundscape of the atheist's questions, and the narrator delivers his words in a vibrating, theatrical voice and uses stage pronunciation (*Bühnenaussprache*) of the r sound (alveolar trill). The parentheses and the silence lines (at 52:31; 52:44; and 52:57) are given in the normal narrating voice and acoustics. This

performance appears as a hybrid of two dramaturgical decisions. On the one hand, in accordance with Böll's text, the manuscript is being read diegetically in silence. On the other hand, the echoing soundscape implies that the taped radiophonic realization is also being played – or, rather, being used or tapped into intermedially to give an impression of the church acoustics. What this means is that the silence parentheticals are silent, or lacking audible information, in that radio play manuscript.

The 1986 version dramatizes the scene as playing back and listening to the tape of the radio drama instead of reading its manuscript. Predictably, church acoustics is there, but the actor playing the atheist does the role more low-key than in the 1965 version, and has no recourse to theatricals. The silence lines are given as long silences (track 12: 00:47–00:53; 01:00–00:05; 01:12–01:15). Or not quite. The whole scene of playback includes the sounds of a studio reel-to-reel tape recorder winding and rewinding, with the sound of distorted speech audible. These sound effects sonically separate the playback scene from the rest of the narration. Furthermore, the segments marked as 'silence' in the script are, on playback, permeated with slight tape hiss and punctuated by the muffled coughs of the two persons present (who are heavy smokers, as is usual in Böll's fiction). Rather than de-authenticating silence, these sounds validate it by functioning as signs of a live acoustic event.

The abridged 1989 adaptation also curtails the church scene by paraphrasing the parenthetical description of the acoustics and the first question. The second and third question are played back from the recording in the manner of the 1986 version, with the agnostic dramatically uttering his questions in an echoing soundspace. Curiously, the answering word 'Schweigen' ['silence'] apparently still played back on the tape, is uttered by a male voice in echoless studio acoustics.

Medial Silences

It is noteworthy that the reel-to-reel has a central role in 'Doktor Murkes gesammeltes Schweigen'. It is the medium enabling Murke to 'collect' silences, the palpable pieces of tape harboring recorded lack of actual sound, noise, or voice. Furthermore, the tape recorder is extensively used as a metaphor in the short story.[7] Murke's interest in recorded silences inevitably has a bearing on the Böll story and its radio play adaptations as well.

Murke's yearning for silence ties in with a technical medium and human taciturnity. Taped reticence contains the noise generated by the medium itself, not only the signs of the soundscape, the spatiotemporal acoustics between interlocutors or within discourse. As a corollary of this, silence appears as plural for Murke. He lists what he cuts off from tapes to be kept for later use, and that inventory also functions as an indication of the semantic variety within silence: 'eine Pause . . . , Seufzer, Atemzüge, absolutes Schweigen . . .' (45). ['a pause . . . , sigh, . . . a breath, or there is absolute silence . . .' (44–46)]. That listing aptly describes what is graphically indicated in the print story and how the different forms of silence are executed in the audio media adaptations. As my analysis in the preceding section shows, what constitutes silence in the radio plays varies from pauses of different lengths to reticent sections marked with Foley and ambient sounds. Absolute silence, however, remains problematic. In my 2008 reading,

> A pause in speech, at least when glottal closure is maintained and no air streams out, would come close to complete silence. However, the pauses and absolute silences that Murke collects are mediated by a recording device of the early 1950s and re-produced with the help of analog electromagnetic technology. The hypothetical absolute silence of the original is, then, inevitably interfered with by harmonic distortion, wow, flutter, and tape hiss upon playback. Recorded silence does have, in this sense, a sound, a certain amount of discernible acoustic information; as a result of

[7] Repetition, coiling movement, recorded and erased signs, and mnemonic functions of mechanical devices are concretized in the paternoster lift and rosary in 'Murke'. More abstractly, some of these features appear in the working of the mind and religious conversions. There is thus a definite resemblance between the reel-to-reel and the objects and characters in the storyworld (see Keskinen 2008: 61–65). In Werner Wolf's terminology, this is implicit intermedial reference, which formally imitates another medium or evokes its cognitive or emotional effects (Wolf 2008: 255).

> the medium, taped reticence is not completely devoid of sonic content. (Keskinen 2008: 54)

That interpretation speculates on the characteristics of recorded sound on the basis of Böll's printed story only. With the radio plays at hand, we can listen to the audio media of and in them. In the 1965 adaptation, there is a slight but discernible background noise (tape hiss) and a monophonic soundscape in the whole recording, due to the technology of its time. In the parts featuring diegetically played tape, the intentionally changed acoustics makes the possibly increased tape hiss (caused by analog generation loss) virtually inaudible. In the 1986 and 1989 versions, although originally analogical recordings, the background noise and tape hiss are considerably quieter than in the 1965 adaptation. The stereophonic sound world of the 1980s adaptations also appears more 'modern' as regards discernibility and dynamics. The tape-playing scenes in the 1980s dramas are marked by noises of the reel-to-reel equipment and the forward and backward running tape at different speeds, but not by the quality of the audio material itself.

In all three radio play adaptations, the silence between words is not crystal clear absence of sound but is permeated with some noise. That noise derives from the source, its generations, digital conversion, the playback equipment, and the speakers or headphones that the listener is using – and one's own body. The noise of silence is thus medial through the whole chain of sound recording, reproduction, and reception.[8] This may be the media lesson

[8] The medium listened to is relevant as regards verisimilitude or trompe l'oreille. Tape hiss coming from tape is more effective than that from a MP3 file or stream music service. When a recording of Carla Bley's composition *Musique Mecanique III* (1979) apparently sticks in the same groove, the illusion is stronger when one is playing a vinyl LP than a CD. In the former, repetition at 33 revolutions per minute sometimes happens; in the latter, the medial dysfunction produces quite different sounds. There is thus media-specificity even when the medium is not working properly.

tacitly taught by ‘Murke’ – alongside John Cage’s composition *4’33”*, some three years before Böll’s short story.

Coda

I have read and listened to Böll’s printed short story and its three radio play adaptations concentrating on silence and its mediation. In my corpus, the print and audio media fold in, turning and coiling on themselves, very much like audiotape on its reel. The initial media representation returns exactly to the media represented: the reel-to-reel tape recorder and radio. In the printed story, silence is either verbally named or typographically indicated in the book medium. In my comparison of three silence-related scenes in the radio plays, I found considerable variation in the length and manner of pauses presented. Typography is not always turned into pauses in the same marked places, but they can move dramaturgically within a passage, nevertheless creating similar impressions and effects as in the original. The sounds emitting from the equipment and from the listeners bracket the playback section from the ambient soundscape of the main narrative. What is done with italics and other typographical means in the print medium is carved out sonically in the audio versions. As for the reception of the reticent parts in the two media, hearing silence, especially if prolonged, in a radio play is more devastating than reading a dash or three suspension points in a book. On the other hand, the essence of silence is by no means singular in audio media. The empirical timing of silence does not necessarily correspond with how it is experienced in reception, since it is presumably determined by variables such as the immediate context in which it occurs, the dramaturgical structure and overall soundscape of the radio play, and the speaker’s pace of delivery.

It is worth considering the actual context and means of listening to a radio play. Live reception beside a radio set or high-fidelity sound system speakers in the privacy of one's home is increasingly giving way to listening to recorded radio plays or podcasts on mobile devices with earphones – noise cancelling or not – in various locations and ambient acoustics. These variables inevitably influence the quality of received sound (or silence) and the amount of interfering outside noise.

The 1965 adaptation remains closest to the print original as it does to its first publication merely a decade earlier. The entire text of the short story is read by a single narrator, who consequently also does all the characters' voices – and silences. The satiric *verbal* content of Böll's story is therefore fully present in the adaptation. The ventriloquizing of different voices, including female ones, may irritate some listeners, as it often does in audiobooks, and draws attention from the content to the articulation. On the other hand, that very channelling of voices, complete with the pauses in them, emphasises the medial quality of the whole narration (and the work it narrates). All literature, whether printed or audio, is mediated, delivered by some means. The same phenomenon, albeit reversely and less completely, happens in the 1989 version, which features a female narrator, perhaps against the naive assumption that a male author's heterodiegetic narrator is somehow male. The 1986 version is the most multivoiced of the three, since it features a male narrator and a full crew of actors. In the 1986 and 1989 versions, the aural worlds are also rich with nonverbal sounds and sound effects that relate to their respective diegetic soundscapes; even 'silences' appear in those sonic contexts. The 1965 adaptation is considerably more ascetic in this respect, but it, too, frames or marks silence with selected sounds effects.

The extra, nonverbal noises in the silent sections similarly indicate, to actual listeners of the radio play, that the silences are part of a supposedly live playback and not instances of dead air or due to malfunctioning of the equipment – both of which are abhorred in radio

broadcasting. The treatment of the play manuscript scene provides interesting intermedial mixes in the adaptations. The presence of medial noise in the silent parts of the radio plays accentuates the problem or relativity of silence in all mediation, perception, and reception. When there is a performance, there is no absolute, pristine silence. The same applies to the presence of a medium.

What the differences between the three adaptions of 'Murke' bring about thematically is, in my reading, that the emphasis shifts from satirizing the vices and follies of the opportunistic persons with susceptible pasts in post-war West Germany. That theme is still discernible in the 1965 version, but the other two radio plays seem to point to more general and perhaps more ambiguous comic portrayals of media and workings of language. The thematic shift also changes the possible countertextual qualities of the Böll story from the referential towards the poetic and the medial.

Mediation nurtures the possibility of remediation, and collecting can prompt re-collecting. Böll's text has indeed inspired a sound art piece in Murke's vein. In 2005/2007, the British sound artist Benjamin Gwilliam made a distillation of the 1986 radio play adaptation, calling it *The Sequential Silences of Dr Murkes gesammeltes Schweigen*. It consists of the silent sequences, diegetic sound effects, and Foley parts of the recording, running for 4 minutes and 51 seconds, but looped so that its running time on the Finetuned internet site is 15'19". The piece executes Murke's project to the letter. It collects the recorded 'silences' of the radio play (in all the senses described in the previous section), as described by the artist:

> This distillation was originally conceived as a tape installation (2005), where the silence cuts from the radio play of the same book were extracted and spliced together into one tape loop, played between several open reel tape players.
>
> For Signal [internet site] I re-edited the loop, referring to the original silence cuts that were predetermined by the radio script, highlighting the lineage of events between the words of a fictitious silence collector. (Gwilliam; typographical errors silently corrected)

The result is by no means ‘silent’, but it is, as all audio media are, permeated with sound. Analog magnetic tape (and its copies with the ensuing generation loss) inevitably bring about noise. In Gwilliam’s piece, there are also audible sounds emitting from the paternoster lift, reel-to-reel, microphone, and intercom. They all demarcate the segments of silence from each other. At the same time, they also tell something fundamental about the nature of communication and media. As Craig Dworkin states in connection with silence, the media (or its signs) are invariably discernible in the message; ‘in the process of transmitting a message the network of recording and playback mechanisms always produce an account of their own instantiation as well’ (Dworkin 2015: 134). This means, as Michel Serres and Wolfgang Iser have put it, that noise is inevitably part of communication, as it always resides in the very communication channel (Dworkin 2015: 134).

‘Murke’ shows, in both print and audio versions, that the medium is part of the ‘message’, even the silent one. This medial and post-literary commonplace is realised in such intermedially overdetermined ways that silence turns out to be, if not loud and clear, then at least noisily countertextual.

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